

SCRIABIN: Symphony 2; Piano Concerto

Kyrill Gerstein, Oslo Philharmonic/ Vasily Petrenko

LAWO 1139—76 minutes

I have played around with this symphony for most of my life. I am drawn back to it even though I don't like Scriabin. The last movement is pretty bombastic, especially in Russian recordings. In 1990 Riccardo Muti recorded it in Philadelphia, and I immediately returned to the piece with the conviction that it had been given new life. But after a few years I decided that the only way to listen to it was IV, V, I, II—leaving out the long central Andante entirely. Maybe what led me to that conclusion was Muti's careless flight thru that movement: his Andante was less than 14 minutes. Here Petrenko takes 18 minutes, and the music is far better for the extra time. Muti has often been an impatient conductor—and thus not one to my liking—so I should have suspected what the real problem was. Also, like so much of what Muti did in Philadelphia, he seemed to have dismantled the famed Philadelphia sound. I heard him conduct Scriabin on a visit back to my parents, and it was deadly. The strings actually sounded weak and scratchy. Vasily Petrenko (not to be confused with the Petrenko in Berlin) is recording three discs of Scriabin. I will only review this one, because I am not interested in the other symphonies. Petrenko was born in St Petersburg and studied with Mariss Jansons, who was an important conductor in this orchestra's history. That may help explain why the orchestra likes him so much. He is also blond and perhaps more Norwegian-looking than Russian. But I have never liked Jansons, and here I do like Petrenko. (I dislike his Tchaikovsky series in Liverpool.)

Everything is beautifully balanced, and the

tempos seem just right for each movement (and mood). The orchestra sounds wonderfully refined, even when the music tends to the bombastic. This recording really makes the Muti sound terrible; it may very well be the best ever of this symphony.

The piano concerto is also excellent—for many of the same reasons. It takes about 26 minutes of the total time. It doesn't interest me as music, but I'll put up with it for the 50-

minute symphony.

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